

1973ff et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following new sections:

"SEC. 108. ELECTRONIC TRANSMITTAL OF BALLOTING MATERIALS.

"(a) IN GENERAL.—Each State, in cooperation with the Presidential designee, shall establish a system for electronic transmittal of balloting materials for overseas voters. The system shall provide for—

"(1) electronic transmittal as an alternative method for transmittal of balloting materials to overseas voters;

"(2) use of the format of the official post card form prescribed under section 101 (or the format of any other registration form provided for under State law) for purposes of absentee voter registration application and absentee ballot application, with the condition that a State may require receipt of a form with an original signature before the ballot of the voter is counted;

"(3) furnishing of absentee ballots by electronic transmittal, from locations within the State, as selected by the chief State election official, to overseas voters who request such transmittal; and

"(4) special alternative methods of transmittal of balloting materials for use only when required by an emergency declared by the President or the Congress.

"(b) FUNDING REQUIREMENT.—The requirements of subsection (a) shall apply to a State with respect to an election—

"(1) if there is full payment by the Federal Government of any additional cost incurred by the State after the date of the enactment of this Act for the implementation of such subsection (a), with such costs to be determined by the Presidential designee and the chief State election official, acting jointly; or

"(2) in any case of less than full payment, as described in paragraph (1), if the State, in the manner provided for under the law of the State, agrees to the application of such requirements.

"SEC. 109. NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENT FOR APPROVAL OF ELECTRONIC TRANSMITTAL METHOD.

"The Presidential designee may not approve use of any method of electronic transmittal for purposes of this Act, unless, not later than 90 days before the effective date of the approval, the Presidential designee submits to the Congress a detailed report describing the method."

(b) DEFINITION AMENDMENT.—Section 107 of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (42 U.S.C. 1973ff-6) is amended—

(1) by striking out "and" at the end of paragraph (7);

(2) by striking out the period at the end of paragraph (8) and inserting in lieu thereof "; and"; and

(3) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(9) the term 'electronic transmittal' means, with respect to balloting materials, transmittal by facsimile machine or other electronic method approved by the Presidential designee."

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall apply with respect to elections taking place after December 31, 1996.

SEC. 6. REPORT PROVISION.

Section 101(b)(6) of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (42 U.S.C. 1973ff-(b)(6)) is amended—

(1) by striking out "participation and" and inserting in lieu thereof "participation,"; and

(2) by inserting before the period at the end the following: "; and a separate analysis of electronic transmittal of balloting materials".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. EHLERS] and the gentleman from California [Mr. FAZIO] will each be recognized for 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. EHLERS].

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation before us amends the Uniform and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act. It was unanimously passed in committee on March 12, 1996.

Currently, 6 million citizens are covered by the provisions of the original act passed in 1986, a decade ago. This includes 1.5 million U.S. military personnel in and out of the United States, their families, and over 3 million U.S. citizens living overseas.

This measure will make it easier for overseas citizens to cast absentee ballots in a timely fashion, and help to guarantee ballot integrity for all those covered in the act by requiring ballot secrecy and the return of the original paper ballots to the State where the ballots are counted. A manager's amendment strengthens the guarantee of ballot secrecy in the bill by providing for ballot confidentiality throughout the federally funded transmission process, not just at the voting location.

I would emphasize, also, that the Federal Government will be paying the full cost of this program, particularly that required to electronically transmit ballot materials. Therefore, this is not an unfunded mandate being imposed on local units of government.

A great many States already provide for electronic transmission of ballot applications and some do for ballots as well. This bill would encourage all States to ensure that all American citizens everywhere throughout the world have speedy access to the voting box.

Mr. Speaker, I urge that we suspend the rules and pass this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FAZIO of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join the gentleman from Michigan, Mr. EHLERS, and Chairman THOMAS in cosponsoring H.R. 3058, to amend the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act.

This is a small, but important, step forward in trying to make it easier for American citizens to register and vote.

The Federal Voting Assistance Program, which administers the law and which operates under the Secretary of Defense, has been very successful over the years in working with the States to facilitate registration and voting by our military personnel, their families, and the several million American citizens who live abroad.

The program has been responsible for a number of innovative ideas in the elections area, including the promotion of electronically transmitted ballot materials which were essential during

the Gulf war, with so many military personnel in a combat area during the election period.

Because of its established organization and lines of authority, the military portion of the voting assistance program has run well and has achieved voting participation rates well in excess of the overall population.

But the several million overseas American civilians are widely dispersed, often isolated, and can be found anywhere around the globe. Many are nowhere near an embassy or consulate but do have access to a fax machine. These amendments, by allowing registration and voting materials to be sent and received electronically while ensuring their security and integrity, will provide a much greater opportunity for those Americans living abroad to participate in our most important democratic responsibility.

This legislation is strongly supported by the Department of Defense and by the various organizations representing citizens abroad. I urge my colleagues to support passage of H.R. 3058.

Mr. Speaker, having no requests for time, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I want to thank the gentleman from California for his support of this legislation and for his comments. He points out very clearly the need to update this legislation to ensure that every citizen, whether serving in the military or as a civilian overseas, has the opportunity to express their opinion, and voice their opinion at the ballot box. I appreciate the support of the gentleman from California [Mr. FAZIO].

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. EHLERS] that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3058, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

SUNDRY MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Sundry messages in writing from the President of the United States were communicated to the House by Mr. Edwin Thomas, one of his secretaries.

QUESTION OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE

Mr. GUNDERSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of personal privilege.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair is aware of the insertion into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD and believes the gentleman raises a question of personal privilege.

The gentleman from Wisconsin [Mr. GUNDERSON] is recognized for 1 hour.